



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

## 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time | Year C



Parable of the Unjust Judge, John Everett Millais, for *The Parables of Our Lord* (1863)



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

### *Prayer for Generosity*

*St. Ignatius of Loyola*

Eternal Word,  
only begotten Son of God,  
Teach me true generosity.  
Teach me to serve you as you deserve.  
To give without counting the cost,  
To fight heedless of wounds,  
To labor without seeking rest,  
To sacrifice myself without thought of any reward  
Save the knowledge that I have done your will.  
Amen.

**Catholic  
Faith, Life  
& Creed**

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Breaking Open the  
Word worksheets  
connect with *Catholic  
Faith, Life, & Creed*  
Doctrinal Sessions.

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## Liturgical Context

- ▶ The Gospels of these weeks are from the section of Luke's Gospel that takes place "on the way to Jerusalem." It is a journey every Christian must take.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

## First Reading: Exodus 17:8-13

- ▶ Moses remains in control and is victorious as long as he keeps his hands raised in the midst of battle.
- ▶ His arms obviously grow tired.
- ▶ However, as long as his arms are raised he maintains the advantage. When he lowers his arms the enemy gains control.
- ▶ This story is a reminder of the authority that was given to Moses by God.
- ▶ Moses was the leader of the people.
- ▶ An entire nation was dependent on his God-given ability to demonstrate authoritative leadership.
- ▶ The faith and welfare of the people were on his shoulders.
- ▶ What is clear in this story is the realization that God protects and provides when called upon in prayer.
- ▶ Moses lifts high the Lord's own staff. It is God who acts through Moses. It is God's initiative.
- ▶ Moses did his part (as we are all called to do) and God anointed his efforts.
- ▶ Human beings are called to accept the things they cannot change and change the things they can when it comes to life's battles and when all else fails get out of the way and allow God to do what God does best.
- ▶ When our limited efforts fail God is there with his rod and his staff to uphold us and protect us.



## Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ Have you ever had a time in which you felt the weight of the world was on your shoulders? What did that experience teach you about yourself?

- ▶ Looking back, what did that experience teach you about God? Can you see the hand of God in that situation?
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God's relationship with us?

## Second Reading: 2 Timothy 3: 14-4:2

- ▶ A primary concern of the pastoral letters was to teach those who held leadership roles in the community.
- ▶ The letters also vicariously instructed the faithful.
- ▶ A primary focus in today's letter is the importance of the word of God in the ongoing mission of the Church.
- ▶ The word is passed from believer to believer, from generation to generation.
- ▶ Paul speaks of the revelation of God [word of God] that was transmitted from Hebrew origins in the Old Testament, followed by the New Testament and finally in the lived tradition of the Church.
- ▶ Paul was expressing continuity between the Old and New Testament. God is revealed through salvation history proclaimed and revealed in both testaments.
- ▶ Paul was a preacher of the Good News. He reminds Timothy that he received the good news of God from his grandmother.
- ▶ It is a reminder to us to remember all those who have handed down the faith to us—people both living and deceased--those first evangelists who were committed to teaching their children the love of God and the love of Christ.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ In what way, if any, is this letter a relevant letter today?
- ▶ Name a significant person or persons in your faith journey.
- ▶ Is there one person you can look to in your life who most revealed, witnessed or showed you by example the love of God? What was it about that person that revealed the love of God to you?
- ▶ What lesson do we have to learn about ourselves and our relationship with God from this reading?

## Gospel: Luke 18, 1-8

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
  
- ▶ The covenant God entered into at the creation of the world was a binding covenant between God and human beings. God promised to take care of us. In response human beings promised to love God with heart and soul and take care of God's creation, especially the orphans and widows who could not care for themselves. To offer hospitality to one of God's poor ones was to offer God's own divine hospitality. The mandate was taken very seriously.
- ▶ The parable in today's Gospel flows from this principle of divine hospitality.
- ▶ There is always a moment of surprise in parables—a “gotcha!”-moment. The surprise in this parable became apparent the moment the woman started to plead her own case, unheard of in that culture.
- ▶ Consider the scene. The parable takes place in the city.
- ▶ In this extreme shame base culture, this would have immediately conjured notions of class distinctions.
- ▶ The judge was a member of the elite class. The listeners were from the lower class.
- ▶ The judge was a scoundrel—he had no fear of God and even less respect for the people.
- ▶ The law did not allow the wife to inherit her husband's estate. However, those in charge of the estate were required by that same law to still take care of her after the husband's death.
- ▶ The Torah demanded that the leftover harvest be given to the widows and orphans.
- ▶ The law is one thing; observance of the law is another. Sometimes the law was ignored and the widow was left to fend for herself.
- ▶ When the law was not followed the transgressors were judged to be wicked evildoers.
- ▶ The judge finally responds to her incessant demands fearing that either she would throttle him or his name would be slandered in the community.
- ▶ The judge *should* have been the one to uphold the rights of the widow, as he was God's representative in such matters. He was responsible for rendering God's judgment.
- ▶ Rather than act out of fear of God or respect for the people, he acted out of fear of the widow and recriminations in the community.
- ▶ A common interpretation of this parable insists that it is a commentary on the persistence of prayer.
- ▶ If that is true, it holds that the unjust judge is a metaphor for God.



- ▶ If the unjust is a metaphor for God, then God is not a very desirable character.
- ▶ A different interpretation, however, suggests that the woman is the metaphor for God in this parable.
- ▶ She is an image of God who relentlessly pursues justice on behalf of his people.
- ▶ She is a powerful woman who never gives up—just as God is all-powerful and never gives up on us.
- ▶ The God as woman metaphor would have startled listeners.
- ▶ Since a woman was equated with powerlessness, the woman portrayed as powerful like God is powerful would have been a shock to their cultural systems.
- ▶ The woman, therefore, is an image of God's power in the midst of powerlessness, God's strength in the midst of weakness, death that saves and ultimately paschal mystery.
- ▶ The woman advocates for her own justice in the midst of her seeming powerlessness.
- ▶ The parable looks forward to Christ whose death becomes the means of our salvation.
- ▶ The beauty in the Scriptures is that it can reveal multiple layers of meaning.
- ▶ Yes, one can draw persistence in prayer from this Gospel.
- ▶ One can also find courage in the face of death-dealing, horrendous odds, courage in the face of power, and persistence not just in prayer but also in demanding justice for one's self and others.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ In what way is this a relevant word for us today?
- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this parable teach you about God?
- ▶ Have you ever spoken truth to power and advocated for justice for yourself or another person? In what way does this Gospel speak to your experience?
- ▶ What do you think this would have aroused in the elite class of Jesus' day? Are there any parallels to be drawn today in our culture?
- ▶ For whom should we be persistent in our efforts to advocate for justice today?
- ▶ What group in our society today might find strength and courage in the face of this parable? What is the good news for such people?
- ▶ What does the message of persistence have to do with what is happening in your life right now?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

### **CONCLUDING PRAYER**

Repeat OPENING PRAYER for this session OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97

## APPENDIX

#1. The daughter of a friend came home and told her parents she was pregnant with twins. The father of the twins said he wanted nothing to do with the pregnancy. The young mother had no insurance and seemingly no options. The local diocese in the state where she lived was asked for assistance since the mother was contemplating abortion. The diocese said they could provide baby clothes and then in essence told her to go and fend for herself.

In most circumstances today that young mother would have had an abortion. Yet in this seemingly hopeless situation her loving family stepped up to the plate, embraced their daughter and today two precious little boys bring great joy to their family. Was it easy? No it was extremely difficult—every step of the way.

God however, blessed and anointed every decision they made when it came to the nurture and wellbeing of the twins. It is as if the parents of the young woman were like Moses. They held up their arms in submission to God's will and every obstacle was cleared and those babies were brought home to the most loving family. What could have been an absolute nightmare due to the surrounding circumstances was instead an event that would forever forge the family into a stronger community of love. What seemed like a hopeless situation turned out to be life giving, tremendously difficult, sacrifice of love. They stepped up to the plate, did what they could do and then they let God lead them the rest of the way.

#2. My earliest recollection of a God messenger was my father. There was never a day that he did not tell me he loved me. There was never a day that he did not tell me that with God all things are possible. There was never a day that he did not tell me that God was his co-pilot and together with God he could tackle anything that came his way.

I watched him take the hand of my mother in every Eucharistic liturgy and together they praised and worshipped God. He had a holy hour every Wednesday night from eleven to twelve before the Blessed Sacrament for thirty years---never missing a night. He was a strong, funny, sometimes gruff, sinner like the rest of us who never forgot who he was—a humble child of God totally dependent on God for life itself. He passed that on to me even though I have not always been the best standard bearer. I could not have had a better teacher.

#3. Right now I feel God is quietly letting me stew in my request--my knocking--my banging on his door for an answer to prayer. The prayer I seek is not just for God to answer my prayer; it is also a prayer of advocacy. It is a prayer seeking justice—a prayer that demands that all who suffer as my child suffers find solace, respite and relief. It is a prayer that seeks proper treatment that will enable those so afflicted to forge a life worth living.

It is a prayer seeking justice for him and for us. Everyone has a right to healing, well-being and emotional, physical and mental wholeness. When laws and society prevent



that from happening, we must become our own advocates. Right now I stand back watching the woman in the parable. Will I be as strong as she? Do I have what it takes to be as persistent? I wait for the door to open and for wisdom to be given as to how to deal with finding help for a child of God who suffers untold pain and suffering. This parable reminds me that I can never give up hope. While God at times seems absent, distant and not behind that knocking door, I have to trust that persistence will pay off and God will prevail. God and only God knows what to do and how to proceed. I will wait for the door to open.



# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Prayer  
Catholic Social teaching  
Sacrament of Reconciliation  
Evangelization

Church and Ecclesiology  
Scripture and Revelation  
Cross and Paschal Mystery  
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## PRAYER

Moses lifted up God's staff and as long as his hands were raised he was victorious. As long as the people prayed, Moses was victorious in battle. Prayer is essential to our Christian life—it is especially essential when facing life's battles. The Moses story today reminds us that we can accomplish all things through Christ who strengthens us if we call on him in faith. Thus, we will focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about PRAYER.

## CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The image of woman (an oppressed person in the culture of Jesus' day) speaking for herself in today's parable of the unjust judge is a reminder of the human dignity of all people which is the basis for the social teaching of the Church. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

## EVANGELIZATION

Today's second reading is a reminder of the power of sharing the Good News with those we love and those with whom we encounter. Paul reminded Timothy how he learned the ways of God from his grandmother. We all have had people in our lives who have had a significant impact on our lives of faith. It is a reminder that we must share the Good News of Christ by word and example each and every day. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

## CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY

Paul's letter is concerned with life in community. He reminds the people that the word of God is transmitted person-to-person and community-to-community. It is a living word lived in lives of real people in real faith communities. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about community—about CHURCH AND ECCLESIOLOGY.

## **REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE I or II**

Paul's letter reminds the people that the word of God is transmitted person-to-person and community-to-community. It is a living word lived in lives of real people in real faith communities. God's word is the revelation of God himself. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches REVELATION AND SCRIPTURE.

## **CROSS and PASCHAL MYSTERY**

Today's parable alludes to the strength in weakness that was demonstrated in Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

## **EUCCHARIST SERIES:**

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Today we will focus on part \_\_\_\_ of the Eucharistic Series.